

# Local agencies learn how to better serve young mothers

BY COURTNEY GAILLARD  
THE CHRONICLE

Health care professionals from around Forsyth County spent July 30 networking at an Agency Sharing Fair.

Dozens of people spent the morning at the Forsyth County Department of Public Health swapping information about pregnancy care and adolescent health.

Among the agencies in attendance at the fair were the Coalition for Drug Abuse Prevention, Family Services Inc., Parent Corps, The Children's Home and WISH (Women's & Infants Services for Health), to name a few.

"One of the goals has been to improve the sharing of information among agencies within the community, and this was a concrete step toward doing that," said Robert Beasley, CEO of Youth Opportunities. Youth Opportunities is a community-based residential treatment and counseling program that offers emergency and short-term group care.

Many of the health care agencies have recently come together and formed the Pregnant and Parenting Teens Coalition to discuss ways to better address the health needs of adolescents in the community.

"The issues that (pregnant and teen parents) face are very unique compared even to other adolescents in general," said Judy Lupo, maternity health supervisor for the Health Department.

According to Lupo, Forsyth County has the highest teen pregnancy rate out of all of the urban counties in North Carolina.

Constance N. Parker, executive director of Wilm-



Constance Parker of WHAT.



Robert Beasley

ington Health Access for Teens (WHAT), was the keynote speaker for the event. She talked about creating and operating a successful adolescent health center, which she started six years ago. WHAT is a nonprofit, private health care facility that provides affordable care for teenagers through a family-centered approach.

"We had a lot of services in Wilmington (before the

center opened), but I would always hear people saying that what we really need is a place where teens feel comfortable in coming (for health care)," Parker said. "We believe that (teens) are important just like (anyone else), and we respect (them)."

General health care, immunizations, counseling, health education, minor illness and injury care are some of the services that WHAT offers to teen patients. All teens receive care at WHAT regardless of their ability to pay.

Before WHAT opened, the teen pregnancy rate in New Hanover County was very high, according to Parker. But between 1990 and 2002, the number of pregnancies in New Hanover County went from 104 to 49 pregnancies per 1,000 15- to 19-year-olds. Parker said the numbers speak of what kind of impact WHAT has had on the adolescent population in that community.

tives also have included gift certificates to the mall and tickets to Wake Forest University sporting events. Teens who have fallen off the wagon, missed school or who have had lapses in their community service hours are subjected to penalties, which could include a night or two in the slammer.

"In many respects it is sort of a tough-love situation," Reingold said. "I have told them over and over, 'I will hold you accountable for what you do.'"

The 12 teens in the program have been referred by judges, lawyers, parents and court officials. The program can accommodate up to 25 teens. But the program deals with more than just the participants. Parents are expected to be willing partners as well.

"How can we deal with the child if we can't deal with the parents, and the child is there at home with the parents?" Williams asked.

Most parents have been willing participants, but some, because of their own problems with drugs, have been ordered to attend parenting and other workshops. Reingold said parental support is key.

"We have had a number of mothers who have broken down in court crying and thanking us for helping to give them their

children back, and certainly that is very rewarding and very motivating," he said.

Todd Parker, case manager for the treatment court, is charged with getting to know the teens and their parents in order to try to decipher what type of programs would be most beneficial. Although drug abuse, mostly marijuana, is an obvious issue for the teens, officials said it is usually a symptom of a much larger problem that someone on the team can usually help solve.

"It takes awhile to build that rapport before they feel comfortable and the families feel comfortable sharing what their issues are," Parker said.

Williams has been out selling the treatment court concept to anyone who will listen. He wants the court around a lot longer than the initial grant will allow. In order for that to happen, Williams is hoping to secure other grants and corporate dollars. Audiences have been receptive to the court, Williams said, especially when they learn that putting a teen through the program costs about 80 percent less than locking him or her up.

The first teens are expected to graduate in December. Officials said they hope the kids will be able to stay on the straight and narrow once the regular supervi-

## Court

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enough funds by next year so that the program can be self-sustaining.

The court uses a holistic approach to reform kids who have strayed off the path instead of the Band-Aid remedies that are handed out in regular Juvenile Court. The court is voluntary, but teens who take part are subjected to regular drug tests, weekly progress and attendance reports from their schools, and are required to attend mental health and other treatment programs if needed. The rewards for the teens are a clean record once they complete the program and, officials hope, a positive new outlook.

A team of professionals — including Chief District Court Judge William Reingold and representatives from the school system, CenterPoint Human Services and court counselors — meet on a regular basis to discuss teens' prospects and progress.

The teens appear before Reingold in court every two weeks so that team members can discuss openly the teens' cases. Teens who do well along the way are rewarded with things as simple as a round of applause from the judge and team members. Incen-

## Latham

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stars on the flag of Algeria. Instead, she said, the vast canvas that she is working with has given her some headaches.

"The bumps in the cinder block makes it hard to get all the little details and the right texture," Holder said as she and Brown worked to put the final touches on the first phase of the project.

Brown is a budding artist in her own right. Her paintings have been featured at Delta Arts Center. Brown has been a long-time friend of Latham. She and Larry Fields, the school's former principal who died suddenly last August, were close friends. Brown was seeking Holder's advice to help Brown with her own art when Holder recruited her to help with the flag project.

Flags that are diverse in color and geographic region have been selected for the hallway. The flag of the United States has been painted prominently at the top of the hallway. Next to that, Brown added the flag of Liberia, an African nation settled by freed slaves from the United States.

"Since it has been in the news a lot, I wanted to include



Geneva Brown and Jennifer Holder work on the American flag, which is the first flag students will see.

it," Brown said.

The flags will be instantly familiar to Latham students and staffers. The school is truly international. The school's student population is evenly split with black and Hispanic students. There is a small group of white students as well. Teachers come from similarly diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds.

By the time the school year is over, Latham students will be familiar with more than countries' flags. This year, students in

each grade level will be assigned two continents to study thoroughly. Students also will get a unique look at the world through a special interactive lab, in which they will be able to communicate with people across the country and in other nations via computers and satellites.

Latham has also regularly sent teachers abroad to study in countries such as France and Mexico. Medlock hopes to send teachers along with students on such trips in the near future.

# Posters to make vacant buildings prettier

SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

Downtown Winston-Salem gets a bold new look this week as the Downtown Winston-Salem Partnership unveils its new Window Facade Beautification Project. The goal of this project is to create an interesting, clean, uniform look across currently vacant downtown store windows.

The project kicks off this week with the addition of new temporary window coverings featuring the downtown Winston-Salem skyline as well as colorful original art from local artists. The production of the coverings was made possible by the law firm of Womble Carlyle Sandridge & Rice, PLLC, a Downtown Winston-Salem Partnership member; its sister company, Ikon Document Services; and Fain Enterprises.

Additional elements of the

project include continued efforts in conjunction with local property owners and the city to maintain a clean, inviting downtown environment for residents, workers and visitors.

West Fourth Street will be the first location to get the new coverings. The Partnership

also will make the coverings available to any businesses that would like to participate.

The Downtown Winston-Salem Partnership is a non-profit organization created to support a vibrant, re-energized downtown that is the center of culture, entertainment and commerce.

## FTCC

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named coordinator of industrial and corporate training. He received a bachelor of science



Hall

degree from N.C. State University in electrical engineering and a master of business administration degree from East Carolina University. Before Forsyth Tech, he was employed with AMP, where he held positions as associate accountant, manufacturing engineering supervisor, EDP systems analyst, program manager, process development manager and industry marketing manager.

He has 22 years of experience in industry and training.

## Grant

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WSSU's education department, said she hopes the academy will make headway in the county's efforts to help minority students close the achievement gap.

"This is something that will help make sure that at-risk stu-

dents are able to succeed," Benson said.

WSSU would provide some of its professors to teach classes. Benson said the academy also would provide the students studying education at WSSU the chance to work in a classroom environment and earn a master of arts degree in teaching while

doing so.

The academy would be housed at the former Independence High School, which was an alternative school for students with behavioral problems before the School Board shut it down earlier this year.

Only eight of the grants will be given out nationwide.



sion dissipates. Reingold admitted that the success of the program can't be immediately determined. Regular progress reports on the graduates are being planned to monitor their post-pro-

gram activities.

"You take your best shot, you keep your fingers crossed, and you hope something sinks in," Reingold said. "If you can save one family, you help save genera-

tions of families after that. At least you have that potential."

For more information about the Forsyth County Juvenile Treatment Court, call Gene Williams at 761-2242.

# MEN

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